

Red Rock Trails Planning
Meeting Notes: August 29th, 2013
Hilton Hotel 6-8PM

Participants: Brian Myers, Craig Stevens, Heide Heidepriem, Steve McClain, Joan McClelland, Martin Glinsky, Chris Halstead, Michaela Fogert, Joan Steninger, Sam Serrill, Andy Beeler, Keith Peterson, Dean Jones, Mike O'Neil, Janic Agyagos, Travis Bone, Amina Sena, Julia Ascoly, John Seyfried, Olga Ostrom, Spence Gustav, Debbie Calia, Janet Levy, Dean Williamson, John Finch, Joan Bouck, Bill Kusner, Justine Kusner, Glenn Slattery, Lars Romig, Kathy Sevy, John Chorlton, Phil Kincheloe, Patrick Kell, Doug Copp, Mike Jefferson, Rama Jon, Stan Mish, Lauren Browne, Aaron Rotert, Francisca Adrian, Jen Hensiek, Cate Bradley (apologies for mis-spellings)

Speakers/Agency Personnel

- Cate Bradley - Facilitator – National Park Service
- Sarah Dechter – NEPA Planner – Coconino National Forest
- Jen Hensiek – Acting District Ranger – Red Rock District – Coconino National Forest
- Janie Agyagos – Wildlife Biologist– Red Rock District – Coconino National Forest
- Travis Bone – Archaeologist – Red Rock District – Coconino National Forest
- Amina Sena - Hydrologist– Red Rock District – Coconino National Forest
- Francisca Adrian – Wilderness/Trails– Red Rock District – Coconino National Forest

Overview of Meeting Objectives

Core Mission: *To gather information, to listen and to communicate needs.*

- Establish the framework and constraints of the planning process
- Present where we are from the dot exercise
- Review of a case study (Twin Buttes) as an example of the planning process in action in order to give a “Bird’s eye view” of the planning process
- Examine the Turkey Creek and Middle Dry Creek areas and how the planning process would apply in these areas.
- Discuss the Survey Monkey results
- How do we boost public involvement?

Framework and constraints in the planning process

- Archaeological, Hydrologic, and Biologic concerns must all work together
- Each step creates a feedback loop. Concerns in one discipline can feedback and raise concerns in a different discipline. This process is costly and time consuming.
- Specific Concerns/Considerations include:
 - Threatened and endangered species
 - Heritage sites
 - Tribal concerns
 - Clean Water Act
 - Soil integrity
 - Research Natural Areas/Botanical Areas
 - The Wilderness Act
 - Wetland preservation and enhancement/Floodplain integrity

Twin Buttes as a case study for how the Forest Service process works and sideboards to consider.

- Twin Buttes – AKA “The Hogs”

- What is the existing condition?
 - Miles of user created trails as well as system trails
- What needs to be done?
 - Make a more effective user system
 - Improve watershed health
- What is the need?
 - Not meeting the Forest Plan
 - Not giving users the experience they want
 - Not improving watershed health
- Sideboards in the Twin Buttes area
 - Bat habitat protection
 - Finding the right soils in the right locations
 - Must be sustainable
 - Avoiding cultural resources
- Where are we at in the planning process for the Twin Buttes area?
 - We are in the comment period.
 - Comments can be offered at: http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=41603
 - Next will be a 45 day appeal period
 - Then will be implementation and trail adoption

Examine the Turkey Creek and Middle Dry Creek areas and how the planning process would apply in these areas.

TURKEY CREEK

- Recreation opportunity and need
 - Opportunity for linkages
 - Red Rock crossing
 - Oak Creek
 - Red Rock State Park
 - Village of Oak Creek area of House Mountain
 - Connections to avoid highway travel
 - Beginner and intermediate trails
 - Parking lot improvements
- Hydrologic concerns
 - Soil Erosion
 - How prone are these soil types to erosion
 - How much rock is in the soil matrix
 - How much vegetation is there to hold back erosion
 - Oak Creek is not attaining environmental standards for water quality. Forest Service wants to avoid making the issue worse.
 - Biological soil crusts keep soil from eroding quickly. Want to avoid reroutes through these areas
- Biologic Concerns
 - Concerns over aquatic/aquatic dependent species
 - Most rare species are riparian dependent or dependent on the habitat directly adjacent to a riparian area

- Example: Red Rock Stone Fly
 - Thought to be extinct
 - Larvae need interspaces between cobbles and boulders
 - Sediment from erosion fills in these crevices
 - Example: Mexican Garter Snake (Very Rare!)
 - Highly aquatic species
 - Needs native fish and frogs to survive (which consume mac-inverts)
 - Macro-invertebrates are the base of the food chain and can be heavily affected by sedimentation.
 - Example: Yellow Billed Cuckoo
 - Generally sensitive to human disturbance (presence/noise etc.)
- Archaeological Concerns
 - Almost no arch surveys in the Turkey Creek area
 - Predictive models show a high site density in that area
 - Adjacent show a high site density
 - This is a caution in terms of planning
 - Will require a lot of re-routing
 - Some segments simply won't be allowed to be added
 - Forest service is required to consult with local tribes and justify their decisions.
- Design Criteria Requirements/Difficulties
 - Equestrian trails often in lowlands with soft soils and are easily eroded and not sustainable
 - Tribal values at risk. Trails can further degrade their use of the landscape.
 - Approximately 3.7 miles of trail proposed
 - Total cost of project depends on the location, soils, and other mitigation efforts (highly variable)

MIDDLE DRY CREEK

- Recreation Opportunity and Need
 - Connections
 - Alternate access points
- Hydrologic concerns
 - Biologic soil crusts that act as a binder
 - We need to utilize slick rock and rocky soils as much as possible in order to call our actions "sustainable"
- Biologic concerns
 - Terrestrial species are a concern, either T&E species or species on the Forest Service list of sensitive species
 - Example: Allen's Lappet-Browed Bat
 - Roost in juniper trees
 - Example: Spotted Skippering (sensitive species)
 - Example: several rare species of agaves
- Archaeological concerns
 - Not a lot of good survey data in this area either
 - In the north of this area, there are a lot of large sites that are hard to avoid in trail planning

- Creek bed itself is dense with sites
- Time and cost of a proper survey will be highly dependent on site density
- Design Criteria Requirements/Difficulties
 - Fewer stream crossings or relocating the location of current stream crossings
 - The RRRD is not a blank slate. We have to adapt trails we already have to be more sustainable

Ranger Hensiek presented a summary of what FS has heard and is thinking regarding trail planning, as follows:

What we have heard:

Several methods were used to assess participants opinion regarding the priority for future trail related expenditures/effort including public meetings to draw on maps, written descriptions of individual ideas, and the use of “dot” priority exercises; an on-line survey; and a visitor center display soliciting public input. These results do not necessarily represent the general public who uses the Red Rock trail system. There was a wide diversity of ideas expressed through each of the venues provided. Here is a summary of what each user group indicated as most important and some common themes:

- The highest priority rating was given to “protect resources”, “add more trails”, and “maintain existing trails”. Respondents seem nearly evenly divided. The next most important item was “access improvements”.
- Equestrian focus – Develop trail system in Turkey Creek area; enhance parking and access from neighborhoods; enhance connectivity of existing trails.
- Mountain Biker focus – Add user created trails in the Twin Buttes area (aka Hogs), and trails west of the Cultural Park and linking to the Girdner Trail (aka Western Civilization, Last Frontier); create trails that are suitable for beginner riders; make more trails for very advanced riders; designate play/jump areas; enhance/create connections between existing trails.
- Hiker focus – Adopt the user created trail known as Transept, and the trail between Bell Rock and Courthouse Butte and trails west of Girdner (mentioned above); create trails to destinations; enhance/create connections between existing trails.
- Both hikers and bikers showed an interest in adding connections in the Carroll Canyon area (aka Special Ed and Highschool user created trails).
- There is a common theme to enhance/create connections between existing trails to enhance for all user types.
- The need for signage improvements did not rate very high by respondents.

What we are thinking.

Forest Service has a regional emphasis on sustainable management practices (environmental, financial, and social) and our budget is going down. Basically if it is not sustainable we should not build it. Some actions that could be taken:

- Assist with efforts of local nonprofits focused on fundraising/grant seeking for FS trail maintenance needs.
- Ensure that lack of trail funds/consequences is known by community leaders.
- Focus on install/add connector trails and reroutes that will help improve and enhance the current trail system and achieve some of the goals of nested loops, longer distance options.
- Focus on the mitigation of environmental impacts in some specific locations. Turkey Creek area is receiving high impacts, primarily from horse use on non-system trails in sandy soils near Oak Creek. Continue with “off trail travel prohibition” where needed.
- Step up messaging about environmental sensitivities and “sharing the trail”.
- Step up use of volunteers/service groups for trail work.
- Work with partners to address trail demands: for example with City of Sedona and Coconino Co. for bike skills parks; with trail users for expansion of trails in new areas; with local venues (concierges and others) to direct users better. FS cannot do this alone.
- Assist with community involvement and responsibility planning (fundraising for building and long term maintenance costs) for any new trails or expansion of the system.

FS must pay attention to visitor safety. Some actions that could be taken:

- Improve signage for safety (possible coordination for an overall signage review and plan.)
- Enhance short scenic vista trail loops from existing parking/amenities to accommodate most visitor needs/demands.
- Work with Trails Safety Committee to address user conflicts/safety issues.
- Continue to maintain multiple use trails except in areas where visitor safety is an issue, for example equestrian use on steep slickrock slopes with drop-offs or areas where user conflicts cannot be mitigated.

Survey Monkey Trends/Results

- 744 Responses with an 88% completion rate
- A “blast” of IMBA members occurred late in the survey period
- Roughly 48% Hiker participation and 52% Mountain Biker participation
 - Comment: Equestrians may have been under-represented
- The connectivity of trails is important
- The USFS is mostly responsible for solving these problems
- Use on natural trail surfaces is preferred
- Trailhead parking needs to be addressed
- There is a lack of variety in the trail system
- 50% of respondents want resource protection and 50% want more trails

Boosting public involvement and fundraising: How do we boost commitment and cooperation?

Brainstorming Session

- Sedona Chamber of Commerce and those taking advantage of the tourism industry should give some funds back to the trails system that helps benefit them.
- Tour permit fees for trail maintenance
- Donations for trail maintenance
- Rental fees for trail maintenance
- Develop clear partnerships with non-profits and the USFS so the barriers are lowered for people to donate. They need to be confident that the money they give is going to the cause that they want to support
- Better represent the trail users as a whole by using the web as a tool to bring them into the conversation
- Advertise at FS events (Verde River Days, V bar V days, etc.)
- Better market the Adopt a Trail Program
- Promote avenues for support at portals for tourists (Bike Shops, Resorts, Kiosks, etc.)
- Peer Pressure – Build support from within
- Make people aware of the areas of trail that are NOT adopted
- Develop a slogan about giving back to the Forest Service
 - Example “Keep Tahoe Blue”
- Develop a sense of ownership within the community
- Create a sense of union between agency and public - Dissolve the barriers!

